The Melville Society

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER, 1949

Volume IV Number 4

According to the editors of **PMLA,** the following American authors have been favorite literary subjects among scholars during 1949: (in the order of their popularity) Melville, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Emerson.

A NOTE ON THE MELVILLE CANON

Since Luther S. Mansfield's identification of Melville as a contributor to the second volume (1847) of the New York humorous weekly **Yankee Doodle,** students of the Melville canon have sought evidence for his possible authorship of other articles in the same magazine in addition to the "Old Zack" series attributed to him by Evert Duyckinck. Some interest has been aroused by a short piece of editorializing published in the issue of August 21, 1847 (II, No. 46), p. 193, under the heading "Cruelty to Seamen," for the article is reminiscent of Melville's humanitarian point of view on the same subject in parts of **Omoo** (1847), in his review for the **Literary World** of **Etchings of a Whaling Cruise** and **Sailor's Life and Sailor's Yarns,** and in his later animadversions on naval discipline in **White-Jacket** (1850). In style, too, it bears some resemblance to Melville's known writing of about the same time, even in details of phrasing.

Although the article was published during Melville's absence from New York on his wedding trip, this fact alone would not rule out the possibility of his authorship: the "Old Zack" series itself, apparently written ahead before his departure, continued to appear regularly during August, 1847. But "Cruelty to Seamen" was occasioned by an item "in a daily paper" which is quoted in its entirety in the article, and which Wilson Heflin has traced to the New York **Herald** for August 8, 1847. As Melville had arrived in Boston on August 2, was married there on August 5, and had left immediately with his bride on a long honeymoon from which he did not return to New York until after the article was published, it seems highly unlikely that even a possible glimpse of the **Herald** in Canada, at Lansingburgh, or at Boston would have moved him to compose "Cruelty to Seamen" and dispatch it to **Yankee Doodle** between August 8 and August 21. Further consideration of the article as a possible addition to the Melville canon seems therefore to be unwarranted.

MERTON M. SEALTS, JR.

BILLY BUDD AS AN OPERA

Charles Anderson reports attending the premiere in Venice, Italy, on September 8, of an opera called **Billy Budd,** based upon Melville's novel. With a libretto written by Salvatore Quasimodo (published in Milan, 1949) and music by Giorgio Federico Ghedini, the opera followed Melville's text rather faithfully and was provided with an extremely effective modern setting. Ghedini has also composed an "Albatross" Symphony, reputedly inspired by **Moby-Dick.** Professor Anderson conducted a seminar on Melville, Emerson, and Whitman for about forty students at Heidelberg during the summer. One noteworthy paper produced was a study comparing **Moby-Dick** and **Faust.**

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

A recently published biography: Geoffrey Stone, **Melville** (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), Great Writers of the World series, $4.50.

James W. Schaefle (University of Maryland) is studying Melville's critical reviews in the **Literary World.**

Harcourt, Brace, and Company have set the latter part of 1950 as the tentative publication date of **The Melville Log,** by Jay Leyda.

The Gilberton Company, Inc., of 510 Sixth Avenue, New York City 11, has published both **Moby-Dick** and **Typee** in comic book form. They appear as No. 5 and No. 36, respectively, in the series known as **Classics Illustrated.** Each contains a brief biography of Melville. **Moby-Dick** was first published in an earlier series called **Classic Comics** by the same company. The publication date of **Typee** appears to be April, 1947.

An article on annotations in books

by Tyrus Hillway, which will appear in the next issue of the **Yale University Library Gazette,** is a Melville item.

Jay Leyda reports "rumors" to the effect that a French dramatization of **Moby-Dick** has been undertaken, that not less than four operas dealing with **Billy Budd** are in process, one in French, one in Italian, one in Dutch (or German?), and one (David Diamond's) in English.

Edward Fiess has announced the revised working title of his dissertation (Yale): "The Romantic Hero in the Work of Herman Melville—the Influence of Byron and Carlyle."

Members of the society who ordered copies of the Melville letters (in the form described in the September Newsletter) and have not yet received them should notify the secretary at once. After waiting until December to make sure that all those interested would have ample time for ordering and also to determine how many copies should be run off, the secretary undertook to have copies made, assembled, and punched. The work has taken considerably more time than he anticipated, but all copies ordered have at last been put in the mails.

It may be of interest to note that a copy of F. S. Drake's **Tea Leaves** (1884), a title mentioned in the September **Newsletter** in connection with a newly discovered Melville letter, was given by Lizzie Melville to her husband in November, 1886. According to the Sealts check-list (No. 498), this copy is now in the collection of Mrs. Binnian.

The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record for October, 1949, publishes an article by Miss Mabel C. Weaks entitled "Some Ancestral Lines of Herman Melville as traced in Funeral and Memorial Spoons," pp. 194-197, with two plates. One plate reproduces the famous Eaton portrait of Melville, and the other shows memorial spoons of the family, two of them from the collection of Victor Hugo Paltsits. Miss Weaks, formerly on the staff of the New York Public Library, is now with the Filson Club of Louisville, Kentucky. Copies of the issue may be secured for two dollars from the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 124 East 58th Street,, New York 22, New York.

Those who have been unable to secure copies of **The Confidence-Man,** recently published by the Grove Press at $1.25, may wish to know that the address of the publisher is 18 Grove Street, New York 14, New York.

OFFICERS

Officers of the Society for 1950 will be the following:

President—Elizabeth Foster (1950)
Secretary—Tyrus Hillway (1952)

Other members of executive committee—Howard P. Vincent (1951), Willard Thorp (1952), Eleanor Melville Metcalf (1953), and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (1954). Dates in parentheses indicate the final year of service. According to custom, the president of the Society each year is that member of the executive committee with greatest seniority.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT, 1949

Cash on hand, Jan. 1, 1949		$68.79
Income—		
Dues paid	85.10	
Interest	.69	
		85.79
Expenses—		
Postage	39.16	
Labor	3.25	
Printing	64.00	
Duplicator paper	9.54	
Incidentals	1.69	
		117.64
Cash on hand, Dec. 31, 1949		$36.94

The funds of the Society are on deposit in the New London (Conn.) City National Bank. Withdrawal slips must be signed by both the president and the secretary.

Members who have not paid their dues (one dollar) for 1950 are invited to do so. Checks and money orders should be made out to The Melville Society and forwarded to the secretary.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER
IS PUBLISHED THREE OR FOUR TIMES EACH YEAR
for the members of the Melville Society, a group of scholars and other persons interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to contribute toward the improvement of the facilities for literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership (including subscription to the Newsletter) may be secured through payment of one dollar annually to the Secretary, Tyrus Hillway, 423 Pequot Avenue, New London, Connecticut.